DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 263 HE 006 386

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TITLE	Current Evaluation Practices in "Innovative" Colleges and Universities. The Research Reporter; Vol. 9, No. 1, 1975.
INSTITUTION	California Univ., Berkeley. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	75
NOTE	5p.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Research Reporter, Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, 2150 Shattuck Avenue, University of California, Berkeley, California 94704
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	Colleges; Decision Making; *Educational Innovation; *Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Experimental Schools; *Higher Education; Open Education; Research Projects; Universities

ABSTRACT

Ths paper describes the results of a questionnaire sent out to 495 institutions of higher education to determine current evaluation practices in innovative colleges and universities. Of the 495 questionnaires mailed, 375 were returned. The results of this survey indicate that a majority of the chosen institutions now have some form of mechanism and that this mechanism is being used in institutional decision making. However, it is not at all clear whether the political clout of the office doing the evaluation is such that people listen to the recommendations of the evaluation specialist. The fact that the data is being used in decision making does not necessarily mean that the decisions being made are good ones. It was also noted that the sample of institutions, carefully selected on a number of criteria that would lead one to believe that they were innovative, have still not moved as consistently as expected toward a rigorous and analytical evaluation scheme. (MJM)

The Research Reporter

The Center for Research and Development in Higher Education

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Volume IX, No. 1 - 1975

Current Evaluation Practices in "Innovative" Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

For several years, we at the Center have been interested in the rapid increase of interest in the area of evaluation in institutions of higher education. Some of this increase is due to new pressures for accountability, coming from legislatures, parents, trustees, and the student who "consumes" higher education and wants his/her money's worth. But in addition, some institutions seemed to be genuinely interested in developing better evaluation procedures as an end in itself, as a way of improving their performance as institutions. We were interested in what institutions were doing in terms of evaluation practices, what use was being made of the results, and what kinds of problems were being encountered.

This paper describes the results of a questionnaire sent out by the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education on June 5, 1974, to 495 institutions of higher education in the country.* Rather than sending questionnaires to all 2690 institutions in the nation, we limited our sample to those institutions that we identified as doing something different and perhaps "innovative" in higher education at the undergraduate level. Our sources for institutions were the lists of membership provided by the Society for Innovation in Higher Education, lists of grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and lists of grants awarded by various foundations, as well as institutions known to members of the staff as doing innovative programming at the undergraduate level.

Our feeling was that if anyone was doing interesting and significant evaluation, both of individual student growth and of programs within an institution, this collection of institutions would probably be the best group to survey. Thus, our institutions were not nationally representative but were systematically biased toward those institutions that had demonstrated some commitment to innovative approaches in undergraduate education, on the assumption that they would also be innovative about their evaluation procedures.

Of the 495 questionnaires mailed, we eventually received 375, for a return rate of 75.8%. However, 33 of these questionnaires were returned too late to be included in the analysis, leaving us with 342 institutions (69%) as the basis for the analysis. We did ask that the institution identify itself by control and level of offerings. Control and level of offerings are presented here simply to give the reader an idea of what the response group looked like in terms of these two dimensions. Six of the 342 respondents did not identify their institutions in this way, and thus some of the tabulations are based on 336 cases.

TABLE A

Responding Institutions by Control and Highest Degree

Control	No.		Percent
Public	164		48.8
Private	172		51.2
Level of Offerings			
Doctorate	83		24.7
Beyond MA, less than doctorate	16	85	25.3
MA	69		
4-5 years BA	93		27.7
2 years	75		22.3

In terms of the persons who filled out questionnaires, 101 were from institutional research offices, 93 from the academic dean's office, 50 from the president's office, 42 from a vice president's office (usually academic), and 47 from a miscellany of administrative offices.

*This project was funded by a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Other publications from this project are listed on pages 4 and 8.

Commitment to Evaluation Research

One of the major questions we used to get at this variable was whether or not the institution had an institutional research office with a full-time director. We found that 175 of our institutions (about 51%) did have an institutional research office with a full-time director, while seven indicated that they had an IR office with a part-time director. Thus, only about 53% of our institutions, even though they were selected for their innovative characteristics, had an office which was devoted to the systematic evaluation of programs. (This is our somewhat idealized view of the role of institutional research offices.) Institutional research offices in our admittedly biased sample are more prevalent in the public sector (105 of 164) than they are in the private (68 of 172).

Another interesting result of our study is that although 53% of the responding institutions indicated that they have an institutional research office with either a full- or part-time director, only 30% of the respondents to the survey indicated that they were IR directors. The questionnaire (sent to the president's office) apparently was routed to some individuals who felt that they should respond rather than the director of institutional research. What this tells one about the political role of the directors of institutional research offices on campus can only be speculated about, but one wonders if some of them are perhaps seen as clerical functionaries rather than line administrators.

We were also interested in knowing, as an index of commitment to evaluation on campus, what percent of the total operating budget of the institution was devoted to evaluation. Here we got the largest "no response" item in our questionnaire. Two hundred and eighty-one of our 342 institutions indicated that they could not respond to the item. This suggests (1) the amounts spent on evaluation were too small to mention, or (2) most institutions cannot break out expenses for evaluation as requested. We suspect that (2) is most common. We wanted to know whether or not an institution-wide committee on evaluation was part of the campus committee structure. One hundred and six of our institutions (31%) had such a committee, while 236 (69%) said that no institution-wide committee on evaluation existed.

Facility Evaluation

The primary mode for faculty evaluation of courses was for the individual faculty member to *initiate* the evaluation process in his class. (Some, of course, use students to collect and analyze the data.) Two hundred and fifty-six institutions indicated that evaluation efforts initiated by individual faculty were their main pattern (75% of our sample), whereas for 25% no faculty efforts at course evaluation were described. However, 225 institutions (66%) had some form of student evaluation of faculty done by *campus-wide* questionnaires, usually "home grown" rather than produced nationally. One hundred and fifty-one of our institutions (44%) have more than individually developed faculty evaluation instruments, but less than institution-wide, usually done by some departments but not all. An obvious problem for the institution which allows the various departments to develop their own evaluation designs concerns the difficulty of developing some sort of compatible framework so that evaluation standards can be maintained across the institution.

Evaluation Procedures Used in "Innovative" Programs

We also asked our respondents to describe the different evaluation procedures that were used for innovative programs. The response rate here was only 77 institutions; 140 answered that they did have different evaluation procedures for innovative endeavors but failed to describe them. Of the 77, 10 named *programs* themselves (such as 4-1-4 or competency); 32 indicated specific *techniques* that were used (such as portfolios or interviewing); 6 named evaluation *designs*; and 29 named evaluation *structures*, such as a faculty committee. Here, a higher percentage of responses came from private institutions than was true of our sample as a whole, indicating perhaps that private institutions are a little further along in terms of being specific about evaluation designs for innovative programs.

Use of Standardized Research Instruments

We asked whether any standardized instruments had been used for campus assessment since 1970, or whether instruments were developed locally; the results were interesting and are presented in Table B. In each of the cate-

TABLE B
Instruments Used

Student Characteristics	No.	% of 342
OPI	48	14.0
MMPI	34	10.0
Other Instruments	51	14.9
Locally Developed	78	22.8
	211	61.7
Environmental Measures		
CCI	19	5.6
CCA	4	1.2
ACE (CIRP)	86	25.1
CUES	52	15.2
HEMEK	18	5.3
Other	14	4.1
Locally Developed	60	17.5
	167	48.8
Institutional Goals/Functioning		
IGI	59	17.3
IFI	45	13.2
Other	13	3.8
Locally Developed	43	12.6
	160	46.8
Course Evaluation		
SIR	18	5.3
ISS	17	5.0
Eval. Univ. Teaching	4	1.2
CEQ	8	2.3
Other	13	3.8
Locally Developed	193	56.4
	253	74.0

gories of instruments used for measuring student characteristics, characteristics of the campus environment, institutional goals and functioning, and course evaluations, institutions clearly prefer locally developed instruments to those that are nationally available. This is particularly true in the area of student evaluations of faculty performance in courses. Although there are problems with commercially produced instruments, one wonders at the efficacy of developing "home grown" instruments in each of these categories. Many of the locally developed faculty evaluation forms, for example, are composed of highly ambiguous items and very poor scoring procedures (for example, if only 5% of the class fills out the questionnaire, the data is often presented with *respondent percentages* only, with no real numbers, allowing no one to know how many of the total class actually responded to the questionnaire).

For certain kinds of evaluations, a good locally developed instrument can be superior, but for assessment of environmental characteristics, locally developed instruments may be doing as much harm as they are doing good, depending on the skill of the individuals making them up. One conclusion from our data is that much remains to be done in finding out more about the quality of the locally developed instruments. Those that we have seen leave much to be desired, and the advantages of local instruments have yet to be established. However, it is quite clear that locally developed instruments are still very widespread in each of these four areas. It may also be that many institutions do not have good access to the range of good instruments already in existence. This is easily remedied.*

The Use of Evaluation Data

We were especially interested in knowing how the variety of data gathered by campuses and presented in Table B was being used in institutional decision-making. These data are rank-ordered below in Table C, with the actual number of institutions reporting the use of each one, plus the percentage of 342, the total respondent group for this item.

One of the difficulties with this table is that we cannot be sure exactly what data was used for each purpose. More than likely student evaluation questionnaire data was used for faculty promotion and tenure decisions, while the environmental assessment measures were probably used in decisions about the development of residential units. Some of the incoming freshmen personality data were probably used in new curriculum and counseling programs. However, we cannot be sure of this based on the data we have. Table C does suggest, however, that the data gathered from evaluation efforts of this sort have been used rather widely across a number of institutional decision-making areas. We ran the data also by control of institutions and by level of highest offerings to see if there were any significant differences in the rank order of how assessment results were used, and found that there were no significant differences.

TABLE C
Use of Assessment Results
(n = 342 institutions)

Use of Assessment Results	No.	% of 342
Institutional long-range planning	191	55.8
Faculty promotion and tenure	140	40.9
Budget development	114	33.3
Develop new curriculum/counseling programs	100	29.2
Reallocation of program funds	91	26.6
New admissions procedures	76	22.2
Develop new residential units	19	5.6
Other Specified Uses		
New programs/Curriculum development	18	5.3
Faculty development/Improvement of instruction	13	3.8
Other institutional matters (e.g., short-range planning, IR priorities)	11	3.2
Student placement/services/activities	10	2.9
Accreditation/Self-study	9	2.6
Allocation of resources	3	.9

*See, e.g., Hodgkinson, J. Hurst, H. Levine, and S. Brint *Manual for the Evaluation of Innovative Programs and Practices in Higher Education*, Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, 1974.

Current Evaluation Problem Areas

We were particularly interested in knowing where our respondents felt more evaluation work needed to be done. Presented below in Table D are the current major problem areas in which respondents were currently working. The best interpretation of this data is to assume that these are evaluation problems that the institution has not yet successfully dealt with; in other words, institutions are attempting to find a satisfactory evaluation strategy for dealing with these particular problems. For the most part, the responses probably indicate a lack of satisfaction with existing evaluation strategies and instruments in these areas.

TABLE D
Evaluation Problem Areas

Evaluation Problem Areas	No.	% of 342
Evaluating effectiveness of new programs	249	72.8
Developing cost effectiveness measures	197	57.6
Studying the learning environment	185	54.1
Using results in decision-making	178	52.0
Studying institutional goals	168	49.1
Translating life experience	113	33.0
Self-studies for accreditation	113	33.0
Studying management structure	109	31.9
Interpreting assessment results	98	28.7

Clearly, the most important evaluation problem our respondents must deal with is that of evaluating the effectiveness of new or modified programs. Two hundred and forty-nine indicate that this is a current difficulty. Following close behind is the need to develop cost-effectiveness measures.

Studying the institution's learning environment and goals is important in 185 of our campuses, as are the problems of using evaluation results in campus decision-making. However, only 178 out of 342 indicated that the latter is a problem, which suggests that in over half the campuses successful use of evaluation data is now being

accomplished in terms of the campus decision-making process. (Or, *no* attempt has been made to use such data.)

The problems of credit for life experience involved somewhat fewer of our institutions. Whether this is because they have satisfactory ways of dealing with these problems or whether it is because the institutions have not yet had to deal with the granting of credit for life experience cannot be determined from our data, although our deliberately biased sample would suggest the former.

It is also interesting that 98 institutions indicated that interpreting the results of assessment data was a fairly major problem. One suspects, on the basis of no evidence, that one of the interpretation problems concerns the fact that their instrumentation may have been "home grown." In this case, because there are no norms with which their performance can be compared, it is highly likely that difficulties would be discovered in terms of figuring out what the results meant for the institution. Another possible interpretation, of course, is that people who are responsible for evaluation efforts have not received proper training and do not know how to interpret the data given. This is speculation, however, as we have no evidence that would indicate the precise reason for the difficulty in interpreting results.

Areas in Which New Measures Were Needed

We also asked institutions what kinds of new measures would be of greatest assistance to them, and in what areas. Here, our institutions were not quite so responsive. We received 270 proposed areas of measurement from the 342 responding institutions. There was very little consensus within the group in terms of what kinds of measurements needed to be developed. However, they could be classified into four or five major headings, including effectiveness measures (79), new models (11), student selection (21), new performance measures of teachers and staff (144), and measures of the environment (15).

This data can be taken as some small appeal from practitioners for better evaluation instruments in these areas. Certainly, the authors of this article agree that these are some of the crucial areas in which new evaluation instruments and strategies have to be developed. However, this does not mean that nationally standardized questionnaires are the only way to proceed. Indeed, for several of these areas (personal growth and teaching competency), the "standard" approach may be the *least* useful, and some thought could be given to other locally normed strategies such as gaming and stimulation, Q-sorts, self-anchoring scales, unobtrusive measures, projective techniques, group evaluations, etc.

Conclusions

The results of this survey indicate that a majority of our institutions now have some form of evaluation mechanism and that this mechanism is being used in institutional decision-making. However, it is not at all clear whether the political "clout" of the office doing the evaluation is such that people listen to the recommendations of the evaluation specialist. The fact that the data is being used in decision-making does not necessarily mean that the decisions made are good ones. It is also somewhat surprising that our sample of institutions, carefully selected on a number of criteria that would lead one to believe that they were "innovative," have still not moved as consistently as we had expected toward a rigorous and analytical evaluation scheme. If these are *experimental* colleges, the evaluation design procedures certainly do not seem to match their interest in curriculum innovation, and without successful checking out of the impact of curricular change, how will an institution know whether the change was worthwhile or not?

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